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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SPD SUFFERS ANOTHER PAINFUL LOSS WITH EUROPEAN  
ELECTIONS

Classified By: CDA JOHN KOENIG FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

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SUMMARY  
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11. (U) The SPD made a disappointing showing in the June 7 European Parliament elections garnering just 20.8 percent of the vote. Coming just weeks after the decisive defeat of its presidential candidate, these results cast doubt on its ability to rebound before the September 27 national elections. Chancellor Angela Merkel's CDU and her Bavarian sister party the CSU came out on top with 37.9 percent -- although down 7 percent from the last European election in 12004. If, as some believe, the EU election previews the parliamentary election results, the CDU/CSU and FDP have cause for cautious optimism regarding their ability to form a razor-thin conservative coalition. The FDP made surprising gains with 11 percent (up 5.9 percent). The Greens and Left Party stayed relatively stable, having failed to capitalize on Germany's economic crisis. Low voter turnout (a historic low of 43.3 percent) was used as an excuse by the SPD and others for their poor showing. END SUMMARY.

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SPD Dejected; FDP Ecstatic  
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12. (U) Political spin control was swift from all parties. SPD Chancellor-Candidate Frank Walter Steinmeier told ARD Television that the results were "disappointing," citing the party's difficulties in mobilizing its base. SPD Chairman Franz Muntefering announced that the SPD was going to mobilize its resources to fight a "dedicated" and "hard" parliamentary election campaign. He reaffirmed that Steinmeier was the best candidate for the chancellor job.

13. (U) Meanwhile, CDU Secretary General Ronald Pofalla proclaimed that the results indicate that the German voters trust Merkel in a time of crisis. FDP Chairman Guido Westerwelle gushed optimism: "No party won as many new voters as we did. This is the best result of the FDP in any European election." He declared that it is the FDP's goal now to put an end to the "Grand" coalition and to prevent the emergence of a left government." The Greens top candidate, Juergen Trittin, tried to dampen the CDU's and FDP's joy by arguing that the FDP won fewer votes than the CDU/CSU lost.

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COMMENT: INDICATOR OF THE NEXT COALITION?  
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14. (C) The EU election results are a brief snapshot of German voting intentions four months before the parliamentary elections on September 27, 2009. German voter turnout in September could well be double that of the EU elections. The influence of the country's continuing economic crisis is also hard to assess. The EU election results, however, clearly portend difficult times ahead for the SPD. The fact that the

party's leaders feel obliged to publicly defend their selection of Steinmeier as chancellor candidate bodes poorly for the party. Since taking the reins of the SPD in September 2008, Muntefering and Steinmeier have neither electrified the party faithful nor appealed successfully to the many undecided voters -- who will play a decisive role in the national elections.

15. (C) The June 7 results also show that the CDU has problems mobilizing its own electoral base and cannot afford to relax. Chancellor Merkel cautioned her party not to be overly confident. If the EU election indicates a trend, it shows that the CDU/CSU and FDP could form a slim majority coalition after the September elections. If they come up short, however, the question becomes whether the CDU/CSU and SPD will opt for another Grand Coalition, or whether a three-party coalition will emerge. End comment.  
Koenig